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ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE  
BUDDHA'S NATIVITY

BY

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## ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BUDDHA'S NATIVITY.

IN an article published in the *Journal Asiatique* as long ago as Jan.-Feb. 1911, we had an opportunity of pointing out the way in which we came to understand the evolution of ancient Buddhist Art in India. An abnormal phenomenon, the absence of the figure of the Buddha from the scenes depicting his own life, necessarily turned our attention to the symbols which take his place on the bas-reliefs of Barhut, Bodh-Gayā and Sāñchī. These constantly repeated emblems, after all few in number and for that reason all the more significant, appeared to us as corresponding specifically to the "Four Great Miracles" which the sculptures group together as frequently as the legend. Through the four miracles the symbols carried us back to the "Four Great Pilgrimages" supposed to have been enjoined by the lips of the dying Buddha. Thus, step by step, we are led back to the worship of the Master's relics and memorials which we know to have been the most ancient rite common to all his followers, zealous laity and ordained monks alike. Now, if after having followed its development beginning at the end, we retrace it in its chronological order, it ensues that the first productions of Buddhist Art—itsself the outward manifestation of this worship—must have been those objects of piety made in the four sacred towns for the use of pilgrims. According to the evidence of the oldest of the known monuments, namely coins, those primitive icons in their simplest form bore little more than the diagram of the object on which, together with the sanctity of the spot, was centred the devotion of the faithful. Those hieroglyphic signs, from being continually circulated throughout India, ended in being considered as actual representations of the "Four Great Miracles", so much so that we find the sculptors of Barhut and Sāñchī obviously struggling with the difficulty of adapting those traditional formulae to the figuration of other episodes of the Buddha's life. On the whole, the theory stands firmly on its four feet; we must nevertheless point out that one of these formulae still remains ill-defined. While the three "canting badges" of the Enlightenment, the First Sermon and the Death were easily recognizable from the most ancient to the most modern images, we noted<sup>1</sup> some hesitation about the special symbol of the "Great Miracle" of the Nativity. While Bodh-Gayā at once

<sup>1</sup> *Cl. J. A.*, Janv.-Fév. 1911, pp. 66 and 72. An English translation with plates will be found in *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and other Essays on Indian and Central Asian Archaeology*, pp. 1-27, Pls. 1-IV.



produced its tree, Benares its wheel and Kuśinagara its funeral mound, Kapilavastu left us wavering (according to the monuments), between the lotus, the zodiacal sign of the bull, the elephant of the Conception, the gateway and horse of the Great Renunciation, and even the eponymous lion of the Śākyaśiṃha. A closer survey of the sculptures of the Old School, beginning with those of Sāñchī, will at last free us from that perplexity.

### I.—THE MOTIF AT SANCHI.

We are already indebted to the five *torāṇa* at Sāñchī—by a surprising piece of luck fairly well preserved—for valuable statistical indications on the relative importance of subjects in Buddhist Art previous to our era. Thanks to a complete collection of photographs of those gateways with which Sir John Marshall so courteously supplied us, we were able to establish beyond question the predominance of the representations of the three last "Great Miracles". Now, a careful examination shows us that a fourth motif alone can claim a share in this overwhelming preponderance. Eliminating those symbols which are not directly connected with Śākyamuni himself, the tree of his *Samboḍhi* is found eighteen times, the wheel of his *Dharma* ten times, the tumulus of his *Parinirvāṇa* twelve times: as the motif in question appears not less than ten times<sup>1</sup> all evidence points to the fact that it depicts the fourth "Great Miracle", that of the Nativity (*Jāti*). Such a conclusion should have been drawn years ago. We ourselves hesitated so long before adopting it merely because it is no easy matter to throw off the yoke of an identification, not only plausible in itself, but already in possession of the field. Now, the ten panels show a female figure either seated or standing on a lotus, and usually between two elephants each holding at the end of his trunk a water-jar which he is emptying over her head (cf. Pl. III). How could such a composition fail at the first glance to remind Cunningham and Fergusson of the mediaeval and present-day images of Śrī or Lakshmī, the Indian goddess of "Fortune"? This generally accepted ascription impeded our researches until we were finally compelled to recognize that "*comparaison n'est pas raison*", i.e., to compare is not to prove. The analogy of these figures, undeniable though it be, is after all only one more testimony in support of the commonplace fact that art motifs survive the ideas which they express, and are capable of assuming from one period and from one religion to another, more than one signification. Need we, for example, recall how the Hermes Kriophoros of the Greeks became the Good Shepherd of the Christians? Not only is there nothing to preclude, but everything to prove that the modern Hindu Lakshmī started in olden days by being the Buddhist Māyā.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When representations of the *lotus with vase* are added to those of the *lotus and female figure*, this number reaches fourteen. For the general statistics of the motifs and reasons for the above-mentioned elimination See: *J. A.*, Janv.-Fév. 1911, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> We have already incidentally noted this, but without advancing any proofs, in an essay on "*Les images indiennes de la Fortune*" (*Mémoires concernant l'Asie orientale*, t. I, 1913, p. 132). [See note at the end, p. 22.]



We fully realize that our word for this is not likely to be accepted on trust and that an argument based merely on statistics is insufficient for general recognition that the present image of the wife of Vishṇu originally portrayed the mother of the Buddha. Our precise intention is to bring forward documents in proof of this statement. Now, curiously enough the absence of the infant Buddha from the representations of his birth—the very fact which anywhere but in India would form the greatest objection to our identification—is what will least detain us, the certainty of this persistently invisible presence having already been settled once and for all. Yet if the lacunæ of the picture do not stop us, it still remains for us to give an account of its constitutive elements. Why is there the lotus which acts either as a seat or a pedestal for this female figure? Why the strange elephants showering water over her? These two details at least require explanation. Need we remind the reader that these same questions put to a Brahman of our times about the modern Lakshmī would puzzle him not a little? If, on the other hand, we succeed in finding in the Buddhist texts direct answers to these queries, we shall then have shown at one and the same time that the motif was created for Māyā, and appropriated, but at a much later date, by the Indian images of "Fortune".

*The Nāga.*—First of all why these unexpected yet kindly water-pouring elephants? We would reply that it is written that at the moment of his birth two *nāga* in the sky miraculously bathed the infant Buddha with two streams of water, one cold and the other warm. This ancient and expressly recorded tradition is figured on Pls. II-IV. Only it must be remembered that the word *nāga* has two meanings. Sometimes it signifies one of those marvellous beings, half-human, half-serpent, to whom all the old Buddhist texts assign the watery world as dwelling, and the distribution of rain as special function<sup>1</sup>; sometimes it designates simply an elephant. This is why, contrary to our expectations, we here see unwieldy elephants fulfil, more or less successfully, a rôle which we should have thought was reserved for water-spirits alone. But whatever interpretation is given to the word *nāga*—and we shall find that the alternative meaning has been also assigned to it by later schools (Pl. VI, 2)—Buddhist tradition alone is in a position, by definite quotations from its scriptures, to justify the presence of these two water-pouring *nāga*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*, II, pp. 28-32.

<sup>2</sup> *Lalitā-vistara*, ed. Lefmann, Halle, 1902, part I, p. 83, lines 21-22: "Nanda-Upanandau ca Nāga-rājānaḥ gaganatale'rdhakāyau sthiteḥ śīta-udga-dve vāridhāre'bhinirmiteḥ Bodhisattva snāpayataḥ sma: And (as soon as he was born) the two Nāga Kings, Nanda and Upananda, standing half-embodied in the sky, created two streams of water, one cold and one warm, to bathe the Bodhisattva"; cf. *ibid.*, p. 93, lines 3-5 and 21. *Majjhima-nikāya*, ed. Chalmers, London, 1899, vol. III, p. 123: "Yadda . . . Bodhisatto mātu kucchimā nikkhamati, dve udakassa dhārā anālikkhā pātubhāvanti, ekā śītaṃ ekā uṇhasa, yena Bodhisattassa udakakiccaṃ karonti mātu ca ti: When the Bodhisattva comes out of his mother's womb, two streams of water are poured from the sky, one cold and one hot, wherewith they perform the ablutions of the Bodhisattva and of his mother." Cf. *Jātakatthavagga*, ed. Fausboll, I, p. 53, lines 6-7; *Mahāvastu*, ed. Senart, I, p. 221, line 1; II, p. 23, line 6 and p. 24, line 2; *Buddhacarita*, ed. Cowell, I, 27 and 35, etc.; and for the local tradition at the Lumbini Garden, near Kapilavastu, about the place where the two "dragon-kings", as the Chinese style the *nāga*, bathed the new-born Bodhisattva, see the relations of Fa-hian and Hsuan-tsang (S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, p. I and II, p. 24).



The question, as everyone can see, answers itself; yet it may be worth while to consider in detail the origin of this pun on the word *nāga*. In all probability the sense of "serpent" (natural or supernatural) is alone primitive; that of "elephant" would be consequent to the loss of the second component of a compound such as "*nāga-nasa*", "having a snake as a nose" or "at the nose". This kind of abbreviation is a fact well known to linguists. Both French and English say, for example, an "aigrette" for a bird which has an "aigrette" on its head. Analogies are not lacking in Sanskrit either: how otherwise could we explain that, for instance, *khadga* means at once "sabre" and "rhinoceros" unless there be in the second acceptance the remains of a compound *khadga-nasa*, "having a sabre on its nose"—a compound which, in this particular case, might even be traced in the derivative synonym *khadgin*, "having a sabre" (i.e., a very sharp horn), and in the analogous *vādhri-nasa* or *vārdhri-nasa*, "having a leather strap at its nose", or "as a nose".<sup>1</sup> However, whether this explanation be accepted or not matters little. The essential point which remains beyond question is that several centuries before our era the double meaning of *nāga* was duly established in the popular usage of Central India; it is found side by side with *gaja*, *hatthi* and *kuñjara* in the old ballad of the six-tusked elephant, known indisputably to be prior to the bas-reliefs of Barhut.<sup>2</sup>

After all, this linguistic discussion concerns us but remotely; it is of more immediate interest to know that the confusion of the two meanings of the word constantly occurs in archæology. We have elsewhere already had occasion to note the curious case of the *stūpa* of *Rāmagrāma*, the only one among the eight original deposits of the Buddha's relics which the Emperor Aśoka had been prevented from excavating. About this *stūpa*, Fa-hian and Hiuan-tsang—those docile echoes of Indian tradition—relate each in the same breath two legends, or rather two versions of the same legend: in one case mythical serpents are given as worshippers of this sanctuary, in the other wild elephants. These twin forms of the same tale clearly result from the two possible interpretations of the word *nāga*, and spring from a common source. Now, we find both of them already represented, the first on the Southern and the second on the Eastern gateway of Sāñchi.<sup>3</sup> But the most remarkable case of this always possible

<sup>1</sup> Pāṇini (V, 4, 118 and 119; VII, 4, 3 and 28) notes that in the possessive compounds (*laku-criki*) the word *ṛśikā* is reduced to *ṛśas* or *ṛś* (eventually *ṛśas* or *ṛś*): this gradual suppression of the final syllables may have favoured the total loss of the word.

<sup>2</sup> The *Chaddanta-jātaka* is No. 514 of the Pāli collection (ed. Fauboll, V, p. 40 and seq.); we refer to the stanzas which constitute the text proper; the use of the word in the commentary alone would prove nothing. (Cf. *Essai de classement chronologique des diverses versions du Saddanta-jātaka* in "Mélanges d'Indianisme offerts à Sylvain Lévi", (1911), p. 241, or *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, p. 185 and seq.). *Nāga* can also be translated by "elephant" in the *Bṛihad-āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, I, 3, 22.

<sup>3</sup> See S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, pp. L-LI, and t. II, p. 26 and seq.; cf. *La porte orientale du stūpa de Sāñchi* in the Bibliothèque de vulgarisation du Musée-Guimet, t. XXXIV, pp. 182 and 228-9; or *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, pp. 78 and 109-110. A sculpture from Sārnāth (*Catalogue*, Pl. XXIII, 5; No. C(b)9) even shows this *stūpa* of Rāmagrāma both encircled by *nāga*-serpents and worshipped by *nāga*-elephants. In the same way Aśvavāta wavers between the form of Indra's elephant and that of a serpent, in which case he becomes the Ekaśāstra of the Buddhist legend, etc.



misapprehension is afforded by the celebrated story, known throughout the whole Buddhist world, of the Master's penultimate terrestrial reincarnation, namely the *Viśvantara-Jātaka*. In all the written versions from the Pāli to the Chinese, including the Sogdian and Tibetan ones,<sup>1</sup> and on all the Indian and Serindian representations<sup>2</sup> the thoughtless gift which brought about the exile of the prince of charity is that of an elephant. Nevertheless, in the Pāli commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) there still lingers an unmistakable indication that the *nāga* was not originally what the prestige of the first images finally succeeded in making him. Therein it is written that his miraculous property was that of producing rain by his mere presence. Now, this is precisely the special endowment of the serpentine water-spirits. Thus, when we read that famine caused by lack of rain lays waste Kalinga and that the king of the country, at a loss what to do, thinks of procuring the marvellous *nāga* to which his neighbour's prosperity is due,<sup>3</sup> it immediately recalls to us the prologue of Prince Sudhana's story in the *Divyāvadāna*. There, also, the King of South Pāñcāla, jealous of the King of North Pāñcāla, attempts to deprive him of his *nāga*, which *nāga* by "bestowing exactly the necessary amount of rain in due season" caused abundance to reign in the kingdom. But, according to the *sūtra*, borrowed from the canon of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin, this *nāga* is clearly a supernatural serpent living in a pool near the capital.<sup>4</sup> The *nāga* of the *Viśvantara-jātaka* must also have belonged to this species of water-spirit before its representation as an elephant switched the story on to quite another track, finally leading the Sogdian and Chinese versions to interpret, quite reasonably, the possession of the royal beast merely as a guarantee of victory over enemies, and no longer as a safeguard against drought and its inevitable consequence, famine.

*The Lotus.*—Thus, the case of the two *nāga* in the Nativity is not an isolated one, and in representing them as elephants the school of Central India simply followed its usual routine. But if all difficulties concerning them are dispelled, we still have to account for the constant presence in the picture of the pink lotus, or more exactly of the *nelumbo speciosum* (Skt. *padma*). Here too, our answer is ready: the lotus is the appointed symbol of a miraculous birth and such was in popular belief, the birth of the future Buddha.

On the first point it would be almost enough to produce the evidence of natural history or simply of the old Indian language. So great is the richness

<sup>1</sup> For the Pāli version, see *Jātaka*, no. 547, transl. by E. B. Cowell; for the Cambodian, *Le Livre de Vésandār*, transl. by Adhémard Leclère; for the Tibetan, *Tibetan Tales*, transl. by Schiefner-Ralston; for the Chinese, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitaka chinois*, transl. by Ed. Chavannes, tome III, p. 362 et seq.; for the Sogdian, R. Gauthiot, *J. A.*, Janv.-Fév. 1912, p. 163 et seq., etc.

<sup>2</sup> Barhut (omitted by Cunningham, but reproduced in *Mémoires concernant l'Asie orientale*, t. III, Pl. II, 1); Sāñchi, North gateway, bottom lintel (*ibid.*, Pl. II, 2); Amarāvati (J. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, Pl. LXV, 1, and J. Burgess, *Buddhist Stūpas of Amarāvati and Jaggaṇapeta*, 1887, Pl. XLIII, 2); Gandhāra (*Art g.-b. du Gandhāra*, fig. 144, and *A. S. I.*, 1909-1910, Pl. XVIII, c.); Ajantā, Cave XVII; Serindia, (Sir Aurel Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, I, fig. 147, and A. Grünwedel, *Alt-buddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan*, p. 329), etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the commentary of the *Vessantara-jātaka*, ed. Fausboll, VI, p. 487.

<sup>4</sup> *Divyāvadāna*, p. 435.



and the transparency of Sanskrit that phenomena are depicted and ideas revealed in the words themselves. The pink lotus is above all the *ab-ja*, the "water-born", the flower which is seen to emerge suddenly where least expected, on the smooth, shining surface of the water. It is also the *panka-ja*, the "mud-born", and although it springs from the foul slime of the depths, the delicacy of its colours and the sweetness of its perfume make it, nevertheless, a paragon of celestial purity. Many synonyms<sup>1</sup> and most of the stereotyped literary phrases relative to the lotus are mere amplifications of these peculiarities. It is then easy to realize how this flower may have become the emblem of a miraculous birth, and since the two ideas go together, of an immaculate one also. That it had indeed become so, we know from trustworthy authority. In the circle of trans-migrations into which all beings are swept, they are subject to divers modes of reincarnation: either oviparous or viviparous, or else through spontaneous generation—this last sometimes natural, as for vermin, and sometimes supernatural, as for gods. This supernatural process, which bears the technical name of *aupapāduka* (Pāli: *opapātika*), is the one which at present concerns us. Everyone will readily admit that birth in a paradise is not the same as on the earth, and especially that one is spared there the shame and pains of generation and travail. But then how does one manage to be born anew therein according to the moral law of *karman*? We need only refer to the many representations of Amitābha's paradise (cf. Pl. VI, 4) and its description in the *Sukhāvati-vyūha*: "The beings who are miraculously reborn therein appear seated, with their legs crossed, on lotuses".<sup>2</sup> In this short sentence, we find incidentally but definitely crystallized that most fugitive of things, symbolism. The lotus flower is no longer the mere emblem, but has become the necessary medium for all supernatural births.

This being admitted, it goes without saying that such ought to have been the birth of the future Saviour of the world. The old Indian exegetists realized this better than anyone else. Nevertheless, they could not overlook the fact that this birth had occurred on our earth and, therefore, it was impossible to free it entirely from common human laws, the more so as certain traditions concerning the pathetic and fleeting figure of Māyā had been handed down in the Community. Consequently we nowhere read in so many words that the Bodhisattva was spontaneously born in a lotus; nor even, as the *Mahāvastu* records of his remote predecessor Dipankara,<sup>3</sup> that the religious crisis of his Enlightenment—that quasi-renaissance which transforms a simple human being into a Buddha superior to the gods—took place inside a lotus. But the texts do at least all they can to spare him the humiliation of having been like all the other children of men. As, after all, the father is always uncertain, they soon

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Amara-kośa*, ed. Sivadatta (Nirayāsagar Press, 1905), I, 10, 36 and seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Santi khalu punar atra, Bhagavan, satte ya aupapādukaḥ pādmeṣu paryāṅkaiḥ prādurbhavantī* (41, p. 65, in *Anecdota Oxoniensia*; cf. transl. in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XLIX, Pt. II, p. 62 and seq.). The reproduction (Pl. VI, 4) is borrowed by kind permission from the paintings of Tun-huang brought back by Sir Aurel Stein.

<sup>3</sup> *Mahāvastu*, I, p. 227.



get rid of the intervention of Suddhodana in this matter, and they insist quite early upon the immaculate conception of the infant Buddha. Yet, even the *Lalita-vistara* never dares go further and attempt the much more difficult undertaking of considering as null and void the traditions concerning his mother. However, if it still makes him born of Māyā, it is careful to enclose him during the period of gestation in a pavilion of precious stones, which utterly secludes and preserves him from the pollutions of the maternal womb. But then you will say, on what will he feed during the "nine or ten" months of this quite unnecessary sojourn? The difficulty is foreseen: a drop of ambrosia, the very quintessence of the world, will sustain him. And where will this drop be distilled? Precisely, in a wonderful lotus where Brahmā will merely have to collect it,<sup>1</sup> and out of which—had not certain hallowed memories stood in the way—it would have been much quicker to bring forth the new-born himself instead of those elements destined to compose his bodily substance. If thus Māyā must throughout the Buddhist Scriptures be left a part in the birth, at least all the texts agree that the more than heavenly child neither entered her womb nor issued from it by the natural ways; finally, to emphasize the miraculous character of his last reincarnation, it is written that he alighted on a lotus and that a lotus sprang up at each of his first seven steps.<sup>2</sup>

We thus notice throughout the texts unmistakable attempts to reconcile the traditions relating to the Birth of the Buddha with the old popular conception of every supernatural birth. It is no less curious to trace in the figured monuments the same conflict between the purely divine idea which worshippers would have liked to conceive of the descent (*avakranti*) of the *Bhagavat*<sup>3</sup> into this world, and the historico-legendary story which had to be repeated concerning his birth of a woman. The direct plastic translation which the half-foreign Gandhāra School gives of this tale altogether omits the lotus—an accessory which it no longer requires—whereas for the old Indian School this symbolic motif was the essential element. This marked contrast is the cause of our having been so slow in discerning the transition between the two different ways in which the old school and the new depicted the Nativity. A careful examina-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lalita-vistara*, ed. Lefmann, Pt. I, pp. 63-64. For the representations of these details at Boro-Budur, see *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, p. 214, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Lalita-vistara*, ed. Lefmann, Pt. I, pp. 83, 84: "Atha Bodhisattvo jātumātroh prthivyām avatarati sma. Samanāṅkaram avatīrṇasya ca Bodhisattvasya Mahāsattvasya mahāprthivīm bhittvā mahāpadmaṃ prādurabhūt... So tasmin mahāpadme sthitvā caturdiśam avalokayati sma... Atha sapta padāni prākrāntaḥ... Yatra yatra Bodhisattvaḥ padam utkiṣpati sma, tatra tatra padmāni prādurbhavanti sma: And the Bodhisattva, as soon as he was born, came down upon earth. And at the moment when the Bodhisattva, that Great Being, came down, a large lotus sprang up, splitting the earth asunder... Standing upon this large lotus he surveyed the four cardinal points... Then he set forth and made seven steps... Wherever the Bodhisattva thrust out his foot, there sprang up a lotus." The same story is repeated in verse, *ibid.*, p. 92, line 18, and p. 93, l. 12-13. The *Mahāvastu* merely compares "the purity of the Bodhisattva coming out of the womb with that of a lotus (*pañka-ja*) coming out of the water", (ed. Senart, I, p. 221, lines 14-5; II, p. 24, l. 1-2); but in the *Buddhacarita* (I, 33) one of the epithets of the resolute, heavy, far-reaching seven steps, viz., *abja-samudgatāni*, must be understood "under each of which sprang up a lotus". Cf. again Hiuan-tsang: "Where his feet had trod, there sprang up great lotus-flowers" (S. *Real Buddhist Records of the Western World*, II, p. 24), etc.

<sup>3</sup> These are the terms used in a well known inscription at Barhut.



tion of the monuments will enable us to overcome this last difficulty and establish the continuity between the latest representations in which the lotus finally reappears under the feet of Māyā (Pl. VI, 3), and the most primitive images which leave out the two *nāga* and even the mother, showing the lotus alone (Pl. I, 1-3, etc.).

## II.—THE EVOLUTION OF THE MOTIF.

Let us sum up the results of these somewhat discursive researches. They all ultimately show that the ten panels from Sāñchī, described above, depict the birth of the Bodhisattva. The details, at first rather startling, of the lotus and the two elephants become, on closer examination, the surest proofs of the proposed identification. We thus gain a valuable landmark in the history of the motif of the Nativity: from this safe and excellently placed starting-point, half-way down the hill, as it were, we can go right up to the origin or right down to the close of its evolution. We shall, however, spare the reader the fatigue of these peripatations and undertake to lead him without undue trouble through all the stages, from the oldest to the most modern monuments. Moreover, whilst the Plates will enable him to make a survey of the successive changes of the scene, they will also afford him illustrative proofs of the theory which is so clearly brought out by their mere assemblage. For our proper rôle is limited to the classification of the documents at our disposal, after which we must simply write what they dictate to us.

I. *The Early Indian School.*—Now, since we decided to begin at the beginning, we shall provisionally place as the initial representations of the Great Miracle of the Nativity, those symbolic lotuses, of every size and material, which Buddhist pilgrims must have either taken home as mementos or brought as votive offerings when visiting the traditional site of their Master's birth in the Lumbinī Garden near Kapilavastu. To be sure, we cannot so far show any of these *signacula*. The earliest evidences of this hypothetical, but very probable custom, are afforded by the lotuses so frequently found on the old rectangular punch-marked coins (Pl. IV, 1-3); so far no positive record allows us to reach further back into the past of Buddhist Art in India. We already noted how, on the very limited surface of those tiny pieces of metal, the lotus often combined with the three other main Buddhist symbols of the tree, wheel and *stūpa*, to complete the group of the four Great Miracles.<sup>1</sup> Further inquiry will determine the part it plays therein.

(1) *The Simple Lotus.* To our newly opened eyes a large number of the bas-reliefs of Barhut, Bodh-Gayā, Mathurā, Sāñchī, Amarāvati, etc., suddenly become intelligible. One of the common-places of Buddhist archæology is the exuberance of lotuses on the old *stūpa*-railings. The decoration of the latter might be said, without exaggeration, to rest entirely on the *padma*. Here, there and everywhere, this all-pervading flower is the first thing to catch the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. D. B. Spooner, *A New Find of Punch-marked Coins*, A. S. I., 1905-06, p. 150.



eye. Constantly seeing it fill with its rose of petals the circles or semi-circles of medallions and half-medallions, one can hardly help suspecting that these owe to it the circular form which they always assume on the oldest pillars; for, after all, square panels would have been as suitable as round medallions to cover the intersections of the perpendicular and horizontal bars in the first sculptured balustrades. One is thus led to wonder whether, at the very beginning, the lotus was not their only decorative motif. Later on, when an inevitable and legitimate desire for variety caused it to be gradually superseded by other subjects, it would in yielding place to them at least have forced upon them its round frame, and this was the reason why the different symbols, sacred animals and, afterwards, even biographical scenes had to submit to being inscribed in a circle. Such would be, in all probability, the origin of those endless "medallions" which were but subsequently replaced by rectangular panels on the entrance-pillars and corner-pillars of the old carved railings.<sup>1</sup> At least the supposition is wonderfully strengthened by a careful study of the earliest sculptured balustrade preserved to us in its entirety, that of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī. When this was still in its primitive state, the lotus reigned alone and supreme over the whole of the outer face; and if it was already banished from the inner face of many medallions, it was but seldom entirely so: there generally remains some suggestion of it in the shape of a rosette or a bud. At all events, however this theory may be regarded, no one could dream of contesting the considerable, nay, the predominant part played by this motif in the decoration of the oldest Buddhist monuments; the new point, and one which we must immediately emphasize, is that this is not simply due to its ornamental effect, felicitous though it be. Not, indeed, that to our mind the Buddhists invented this symbol; exactly as in the case of the wheel, for instance, it was neither created by them nor even for them. No doubt the origin of these emblems already belonged to the remotest antiquity when those *rāpakāraka*, to whom we are indebted for their earliest known carved representations, first used them to adorn *stūpa*-railings. Now we begin to perceive, as this essay will show, that neither pure chance nor mere artistic caprice prompted their choice, but that the old symbolic lotus was from the beginning adopted by the Buddhists to stand for the first among the Four Great Miracles of their Master.

(2) *The Composite Lotus*.—When we examine the countless lotuses on our railings, two points immediately attract our notice. First, the simplest have an unlikely number of petals and give evidence of an extremely conventionalized style. Then, no two of them are exactly alike, and it is clear that the artists taxed their ingenuity to draw them in every conceivable way. We cannot undertake to give a detailed description of their endless variations; what interests us here is not so much their undeniable diversity as what we ought to

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that such pillars with square panels are to be found at the entrance to *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī, to say nothing of the gates at *Stūpa* I, as well as at the corners of the railings of Bôdh-Gayā and Barhut; we must admit their later date, proved by their more advanced technique.



seek under that diversity. Obviously this depends on each particular case. So long as the sculptors limit themselves to increasing the number of petals (Pl. I, 1), or to curving them into volutes (Pl. I, 2), or again to bending some of them over the heart of the flower (Pl. I, 3) and so on, it would be absurd in our opinion to see in such changes anything save a purely ornamental refinement of the type. But when the stone-carvers go further and introduce new elements into the motif, it may be easily surmised that they have some special purpose in so doing. In reality, their devices simply tend to revive and strengthen the original meaning of a symbol, apparently somewhat hackneyed through long and excessive use. When, for instance, they follow a practice, the vogue of which is also attested by the old coins, and replace the petals of the lotus by the points of four *nandi-pada* or "taurines" (Pls. II, 1; III, 1; IV, 2, 3), how could we fail to recall that the latter emblem<sup>1</sup> contains at least an allusion to the Buddha's birth? In other cases, to emphasize still more this particular application, they show the elephant of the Conception in profile on a background composed of a lotus which, as usual, takes up the whole surface of the medallion (Pl. III, 2); or else they surround the middle lotus by four elephants (Pl. I, 5), and in order to prevent any doubt, each of these also holds a lotus in its trunk.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes they use in the same way (Pl. I, 4 and Pl. III, 3), or still more freely, (Pl. III, 4) the "lion of the Śākya", occasionally winged. Lastly, at Barhut as at Bodh-Gayā, the heart of the flower is often filled with a human head or a bust. Here we must be careful to take into consideration the fantasy of the sculptors; it would indeed be imprudent to confer on each of these personages a name borrowed from the Buddhist legend. Still we should be greatly surprised if the artist of the medallion on Pl. I, 6, had not Māyā in mind when he thus framed in a lotus the bust of a woman, herself holding a lotus in her right hand; that in this case he simply did pioneer's work would be immediately proved if we allowed ourselves to take a peep in advance at Pls. II, 5-6; III, 7-13; IV, 5-8, 14-15; for the necessity of constantly refraining from rushing at once to the most convincing examples is the sole drawback to the plan which we have adopted.

(3) *The Lotus with Vase*.—The proper thing to do, however, is to follow patiently on the Plates, the regular evolution of the floral motif. Soon not satisfied with surrounding the lotus by one or more concentric garlands—themselves sometimes made up of lotuses (Pls. I, 3; II, 2-3)—the sculptors go so far as to break the unity of the central flower, and fill the field of the medallion with smaller lotuses, entwined in every possible way with their stalks, buds and leaves. In the most frequent and ubiquitous arrangement, the lotuses spread out in a bouquet, springing gracefully from a vase which must, of course, be supposed

<sup>1</sup> Balustrade of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchi, pillars 31b, 34a, 56b, 68b, 72a, 82b, 83a, 87b; Barhut, pillars 19a and b (cf. Cunningham, Pl. XXXVIII, 2). For the significance of the *nandi-pada* as a reference to the time of the year at which the Buddha's birth occurred, see the explanation of Pl. I in *Beginnings of Buddhist Art* or *J. A.*, Janv.-Fév. 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Sāñchi, *Stūpa* II, 16b; Barhut, *sūcā* 20, obverse and reverse (Cunningham, Pl. XXXIV, 5). Cf. the elephant of the Conception at Sāñchi (*Stūpa* II) and Barhut.



full of water. The reasons for the manifest success of this new development are not far to seek; not only by its elegant disposition did it gratify the strong decorative sense of the old image-carvers, but it also possessed in their eyes the advantage of combining with the symbol of the lotus another emblem of great auspiciousness, since, for an Indian, the sight of a brimming water-vessel (*pūrṇa-ghaṭa*) is a most propitious omen.<sup>1</sup> All this may help us to understand the fact of its universal diffusion throughout India. We shall meet it indeed, not only on the old railings of Sāñchī and Barhut (Pls. II, 3-4; III, 4-6), and on the gateways of Sāñchī (Pl. III, 10), but also in every place where the Early School flourished for a time, whether in Mathurā or in Amarāvati. It even forced its way into the stronghold of Indo-Greek art. The manner in which it crops up in such widely separated sites is the more worth recording as each instance brings additional confirmation of the significance which we ascribe to it—or more exactly, which its place in the series of our documents assigns to it. Thus at Amarāvati, (Pl. IV, 10, 11) on the steles divided horizontally into four compartments, numerous remains of which are still in existence, these *ghaṭa* occupied the first or lowest panel. Since these steles always bear superposed representations of the "Four Great Miracles," it clearly ensues that the vases of lotuses correspond to the first one, that is, to the Nativity.<sup>2</sup> Again, on the Mathurā lintel from which we have borrowed the *ghaṭa* reproduced on Pl. IV, 12, Prof. J. Ph. Vogel has already recognized the three scenes of the Supreme Enlightenment, First Sermon and Last Decease, in the worship of the tree, wheel and tumulus;<sup>3</sup> obviously enough, the jar of lotuses was meant to stand for the Last Birth. Nor shall we feel astonished at meeting this emblem in Gandhāra (see Pl. V), considering that the symbol of the wheel has likewise been used there with its traditional meaning.<sup>4</sup> A few replicas of this emblem lay unnoticed in the Museums of Calcutta and Lahore; two others were excavated at Sahri-Bahlol by Dr. D. B. Spooner who at once saw that it was not a purely decorative motif.<sup>5</sup> The latter finds were added to a curious intaglio (Pl. V, 4) already in the Peshawar Museum, and which may, in its turn, be compared with some ancient coins (Pl. IV, 9). Such tiny specimens, easily carried about by monks and faithful

<sup>1</sup> This is as true of the present as of the past. Let us simply quote the mediaeval evidence of Bāṇa (VII century A.D.), who in the *Harpacarita* tells us that he did not fail to set out to the king's court under such happy auspices. See also the *puppha-puṇṇa-ghaṭa* of the *Mahāvastu*, (Geiger's ed., chap. 30, v. 71). Incidentally note that the novel representation of the flower calyx, now shown more or less in profile, naturally suggested itself as a seat for the figure of Māyā.

<sup>2</sup> Let us note at once, among the several independent peculiarities of the Amarāvati or Andhra School in South-Eastern India, that it did not develop further the process of symbolising the Nativity: the evolution of the lotus motif, as shown below in §§ 4 and 5, occurred only in the Central Indian School. To the last the representations of the Birth at Amarāvati differed from those at Barhut and Sāñchī on the one hand, in that they never depict the bathing elephants, and from those of Gandhāra on the other hand, in that they never figure the Bodhisattva (see J. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, London, 1873, Pls. LXV, 3 and XCI, 4; J. Burgess, *The Buddhist Stūpas of Amarāvati and Jaggaṇapeta*, London, 1887, Pl. XXXII, 2).

<sup>3</sup> *A. S. I.*, 1909-10, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> See a symbolical representation of the First Sermon in *Art g-5-du Gandhāra*, fig. 218 and cf. *ibid.*, p. 613.

<sup>5</sup> *A. S. I.*, 1909-10, pp. 51, 52.



laymen, explain how this motif of the vase of lotuses could thus travel far and wide.

(4) *The Lotus with a Female Figure*.—By this slow but sure way, we at last reach the moment when the appearance of Māyā dispels any doubts we still might harbour regarding the original significance of the lotus emblem. In this strange representation of a birth the sculptors, as soon as they made bold to figure the mother, naturally placed her, either sitting or standing, on the flower ready to receive her. The direct transition from what seemed to be a purely decorative motif to the hieratic scene in which we recognized above<sup>1</sup> the First Miracle of the Buddha, i.e., his Nativity, is thus presented to our minds through our own eyes. As usual we meet all the variations possible on the given theme, as may be seen on the Plates where the multifarious efforts of the old stone-carvers have been brought together for the convenience of the reader. At first the scene remains encircled within a medallion (Pl. III, 7-9), but it soon elects a square framework as more suitable. In some examples the lotus which supports Māyā still springs from a vase (Pls. II, 5-6; III, 12). As for Māyā, she is sometimes seated, sometimes standing; in the first attitude she crosses her legs tightly after the fashion of the *yogi* (Pls. II, 5; III, 11) or, with her right leg bent and her left leg hanging down, she affects the careless pose known as *līlāsana* (Pl. III, 12). In most cases, not content with her lotus seat or her lotus pedestal alone, she holds one of those flowers in her hand, and this detail in its turn serves as a link with quite another series of documents, all the more interesting because they are approximately dated and thus throw some light on the probable period of the bas-reliefs. We allude to a group of Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian coins which, although struck by Yavana and Śaka kings, nevertheless bear not only exergues in Indian language and script, but also several types of a distinctly Buddhist character.<sup>2</sup> Among the latter shall we henceforward place the female figure to which we have just restored its proper name, Māyā (Pl. IV, 5-8)? In the case of the coins as in the sculptures we confess that conviction makes itself felt only at the end of the series, but once realized, the identification goes back without effort to the very beginning. And this starting point is actually given by the coins of Pantaleon and Agathocles on the reverses of which, knowing no better, numismatists had believed they saw some female "dancers". They would have experienced considerable embarrassment in explaining why these "*Rājās*" as the *Brāhmī* inscriptions designate them, should have accorded to simple dancing girls an honour always reserved for divinities or religious symbols. When later this same female, still standing in the same attitude with the left hand on the hip and holding a lotus in her right hand was again met with on the coins of Azes,

<sup>1</sup> *Supra* Part I.

<sup>2</sup> Such is the case of the "wheel" on certain coins of Menander and also perhaps of the four sacred animals, etc. (cf. F. Gardner, *Cat. of Indo-Greek Coins*, Pl. XII, 7, etc.).



the lotus cushion which the engraver had placed under her feet<sup>1</sup> induced them to regard her with more reverence and they were disposed to bestow on her the name of Lakshmi. Finally this latter designation seemed to be admitted as, without possible question when she appeared again on the coins of Azilises with two water-pouring elephants. It is now for the reader to examine this somewhat incoherent interpretation of this figure for it follows clearly from a study of the monuments on Plate III that if this identification is no longer true for the figure on the bas-reliefs, it can no longer remain so for that on the coins. In both cases we must recognize the early way of picturing the Buddha's Nativity; and when this new vein is worked, the same will prove true for quite a number of other ancient coins published long ago by Cunningham.<sup>2</sup>

(5) *The Lotus with the Female Figure and the Two Nāga*.—What indissolubly unites the fortunes of the numismatic and sculptural motifs is the appearance in both of the characteristic feature of the two *nāga*-elephants which bathed the invisible Buddha, as soon as he was born, by emptying over him water-jars held by the end of their trunks. Such, at least, as we have seen in detail above, is the only plausible way, and the only one countenanced by texts, of interpreting the presence and the performance of these two beasts. A point worthy of notice is the unvarying sameness of their pose: both of them are so completely absorbed in their traditional task that they never think of changing their attitude. Whether it be at Sāñchī (Pl. III, 9, 12-13) or at Barhut (Pl. II, 5-6), at Bodh-Gayā or Mathurā (Pl. IV, 13-14)<sup>3</sup>—they are always seen in profile facing one another, their trunks symmetrically raised just over the head of Māyā. Like her, they naturally came to take their stand on lotuses, which sometimes spring from a vase: it is obvious that they, too, are a kind of specific detail subsequently added to the older theme in order to lay stress on its signification. Had not the lotus filled from the very beginning all the available space, no one would ever have dreamt of using the frail cup of a flower as a support for an adult human being, still less for huge elephants. We are thus able to observe retrospectively the old image-makers' increasingly bold attempts at grafting on to the traditional symbol everything which could render its meaning more forcible. Not only did they strive to renovate a model which had become commonplace, but they also tried to express more and more clearly a miracle which at first they had been content simply to suggest. The superstition of precedents alone prevented them from going further in this direction. The

<sup>1</sup> It may be noted in passing that in certain of the representations of the Nativity on the railing of Stūpa II at Sāñchī Māyā has no longer any lotus under her feet, precisely as on the coins of Pantaleon and Agathocles.

<sup>2</sup> A. Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*, Pl. V, 1-3 (where the woman of the Nativity and the deer of the First Sermon are grouped with the tree of the Illumination and stūpa of the Supreme Decease; *ibid.*, on the reverse of Nos. 4, 5, notice that, for want of space, the lotus vase occupies the place of the woman with the lotus); Pl. V, 9 (with the Bodhi-tree on the reverse); Pl. VII, 4, 5, etc. We do not mean to say that all the female figures holding a lotus are to be identified with Māyā; the type has been very appropriately used, for instance, as shown by Prof. E. Rapson, on a well-known coin to represent the City-goddess of Puṣkarāvati, the "lotus-town": but there the goddess wears a mural crown [See also *Cambridge History of India*, I, p. 587 and Pl. VI, 10].

<sup>3</sup> For a slight difference at Udayagiri, see the commentary to Pl. IV, 15.



limit of their innovations seems to have been reached in Pl. III, 13, where, to the two *nāga* and the standing female figure, is added a parasol which, according to the practice of the school, invariably indicates the invisible presence of the Bhagavat.<sup>1</sup> In fact, to realise a completely explicit representation of the Nativity, it merely remained for them to picture the infant Buddha himself; but only the Indo-Greek artists of Gandhāra could take this decisive step.

II. *The Gandhāra School*.—In the case of the First Great Miracle as in that of the other three, the compositions of the Indo-Greek sculptors indicate a complete divorce from the artistic traditions of Central India, to which they were naturally strangers by education if not by race. In this instance, as we have already intimated above, the contrast is even more disconcerting. For, indeed, in the newly-created models of the North-West, the Bodhi-tree still shades the Master at his Enlightenment, the wheel of the Law still turns under his hand at the First Sermon, and the placing of his ashes in a *stūpa* still follows closely on the friezes, the scene of his Last Decease,<sup>2</sup> whilst, on the contrary, we can but note in the Gandhāra Nativities the total disappearance of the emblematic lotus. After all, what need had the Gandhāra sculptors to symbolize the birth of the future Buddha, since they depicted it in a direct and detailed manner, including the new-born himself? In this instance they drew the Central Indian motif altogether anew, retaining only the indispensable figure of the mother. Admitted but late by the Old School into the original lotus ornament, *Māyā*, once the flowers were discarded, remained as the sole connecting link between these earlier attempts and the more spirited pictures of the New School. In agreement with the text she naturally maintains her standing posture; but, by a sensational innovation, the Bodhisattva springs from her right side, while the gods are grouped at her right and her women at her left (Pl. VI, 1). Moreover, these gods and women now attend the Bodhisattva's "Seven Steps" and give him his first bath without any further need of either *padma* or *nāga*.

Here, we tread familiar ground and need not insist on these several points.<sup>3</sup> All that we wish to note once more in passing is the side-light which our documents incidentally throw on the date of the Gandhāra School. The presence, not only at Barhut and Bodh-Gayā, but also on the railing of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī, of the Central Indian formula of the Nativity in its most developed form, shows that it could not have been created later than the II century B.C. On the other hand, the fact that towards the middle of the I century B.C. in the North-West of India, Azilises' mint should still stamp it on his coins, by no means implies that the Gandhāra type had not yet been born: as everyone knows,

<sup>1</sup> It is needless to say that all the texts record the apparition, in order to shelter the new-born Bodhisattva, of this large, white and precious *chakra* (and also of the fly-flap seen on Pl. VI, 1; both are shown on Pl. III, 8): cf. *Lalitavistara*, ed. Lefmann, p. 84, lines 3 and 18; p. 94, l. 1; *Mahāvaṃsa*, ed. Senart, I, p. 230, l. 11, II, p. 22, l. 12; *Majjhima-nikāya*, ed. Chalmers, III, p. 123; *Buddha-carita*, ed. and transl. Cowell, I, 37, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Let us, however, note that the contrast between the two representations of the Nativity, (a) by the lotus symbol, (b) by the birth-scene, is after all no greater than that between the two representations of the Parinirvāṇa (a) by the *stūpa*, (b) by the Buddha on his death-bed.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. *Art g.-b. du Gandhāra*, figs. 152-158.



it is the distinguishing feature of a government administration always to lag behind the times. Still it would lead us to think that the model of the Early School was then far from obsolete. In short, if many reasons already detailed elsewhere<sup>1</sup> prevent us from placing the origins of Graeco-Buddhist art later than the beginning of the I century A.D. the archaic character of Azilises' coins warns us that it would be unwise to carry them much further back than the end of the I century B.C. Indianists have so few historical data at their disposal that they cannot afford to spurn this additional evidence, slight though it may be.

III. *The Mediaeval Schools*.—Nor should our inquiry close here: a glance at the later Indian Schools will indirectly confirm the identification which we suggested for our plates or rather which they imposed upon us (Pls. I-V). At the conclusion of our essay on "The Beginnings of Buddhist Art", we had already noted the tendency of the ancient symbols, once the Gandhāra revolution was over, to resume the rôle which they played on the earliest monuments. The mediaeval representations of the Nativity do not escape the general rule, and they soon re-adopt the lotus and the *nāga* which the Graeco-Buddhist school had discarded.

*The Reappearance of the Nāga*.—As we go east towards Mathurā and draw nearer to the heart of India, we note that the first care of the local artists is to reinstate the two *nāga* in the episode of the Bath. Only here they understand and interpret the scene much better. Ought we to infer that the superstitious beliefs about the serpent genii, who watch and rule over running water and rain-storms, belonged more naturally to the North-West and the Himālayas than to the rest of the Peninsula? To-day Nāgas are still popular in Kashmir and Nepal, while monuments testify that at an early date their cult was widely spread throughout the Panjāb and the region of Mathurā<sup>2</sup>. We know for certain that the Indo-Greek sculptors themselves were well acquainted with this piece of folklore although the creator of the Gandhāra motif of the Bath chose to ignore it. Making use of the personages ready at hand he placed the Bodhisattva straightway on a classical tripod and, whilst the queen's women-attendants upheld the child, Indra and Brahmā poured the water of the bath over his head<sup>3</sup>. As soon as the Graeco-Buddhist repertory reaches Mathurā, the local image-carvers relieve the great gods of this duty, entrusting it to subordinate deities more fitted for the work. On either side of the infant Buddha, two genii with heads surmounted

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Art. g.-b. du Gandhāra*, II, p. 486, et seq.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ph. Vogel, *A. S. I.*, 1908-9, p. 159. Here again is another instance of image transference: these Nāga-statues are nowadays worshipped under the name of Bala-Rāma, Kṛṣṇa's brother. [Since then Prof. J. Ph. Vogel has published a splendid monograph on *Indian Serpent-Lore or the Nāga in Hindu Legend and Art*, London, 1926.]

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Art. g.-b. du Gandhāra*, figs. 156, 157 (but see figs. 194-196, 270-275, 318-321, etc.). Whether due or not to the influence of the sculptures, the *Lalitavistara* (ed. Lefmann, pp. 83, 84; cf. p. 93) presents two versions of the Bath: first, the bath given by the two *nāga*, and then, by the gods, with Indra and Brahmā at their head. [Since the above was written, the monuments have taught us another lesson about the danger of being too affirmative in matters of archaeology. Mr. H. Hargreaves has shown (*A. S. I.*, 1924-5, Pl. XXXIX (c); cf. *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology*, Leyden, 1927, Pl. III b) that the Gandhāra sculptors did not always discard the bathing *nāgas*, not even in their serpentine form.]



by hoods of cobras rise out of the ground showing their torsos above the margin of a fountain<sup>1</sup>. We find the same kind of *nāga* in the Gupta period on the four-storied steles excavated at Sārnāth near Benares, the lowest panels of which are devoted to the first part of the Master's life (Pl. VI, 2); only here, the *nāga* are more logically placed and are represented in a more definite manner, for they float in the air just above the infant whom they bathe and, in addition to their many-headed *capello*, they each have a serpent's tail<sup>2</sup>. These are, to be sure, very different from the elephants of the Old School: only their attributes, the round, inverted water-jars which they still hold in their hands—as also did the gods in the Gandhāra version—and which the elephants grasped with the end of their trunks, plainly show that these half-human, half-reptilian *nāga* must be the substitutes for their proboscidian predecessors. For though in the three great periods of Indian Buddhist art, the personages in the Birth Scene may have changed, the traditional manner of performing the bath—or rather the shower-bath—has remained unaltered. Thanks to the *lakṣhaṇa* or specific indication of the water-jars, we immediately recognize from the beginning to the end of the series, replicas of the same legendary episode, namely the *abhiṣheka*, in the Indian fashion, of the infant Buddha, even where the latter (as on Pl. II, 5, 6, etc.) is conspicuous only by his absence.

*The Reappearance of the Lotus.*—The above remark is, after all, a mere additional detail in the demonstration of our thesis. On the above-mentioned steles from Benares another characteristic feature concerns us more directly; in their combined representations of the "Birth", the "Seven Steps" and the "Bath", the new-born is always figured standing on the calyx of a full-blown *padma*. A fresco of Cave II at Ajantā<sup>3</sup>, and the long frieze at Boro-Budur<sup>4</sup> even give a row of seven lotuses to act as supports for each of the seven first steps. On the other hand, the miniatures and the Bengali sculptures (Pl. VI, 3), where space is limited, heap seven flowers one above the other and perch on the top the little Bodhisattva. Far from letting his feet come in contact with the ground as he did in Gandhāra, he no longer even touches it. But it is not only between him and the earth that the symbolic *padma* of old occurs to assure us of his immaculate purity: it reappears at the same time under the feet of Māyā, exactly as it did a thousand years before on the coins and bas-reliefs previous to the Christian era. Thus under the continuous pressure of popular beliefs, the motifs of former days, buried for a while beneath the avalanche of classicism, again rise slowly to the surface of art.

<sup>1</sup> A. S. I., 1906-7, Pl. LIII. Cf. for Amarāvati, Fergusson, Pl. XCI.

<sup>2</sup> For the lower part of the *nāgas'* bodies in Gandhāra, see *Art. g. b. du Gandhāra* II, pp. 31 and 32.

<sup>3</sup> Griffiths: *The Paintings in the Buddhist Caves at Ajantā*, Pl. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. M. Pleyte, *Die Buddha-Legende in den Skulpturen des Tempels von Boro-Budur*, (Amsterdam, 1901-2), fig. 28. For the paintings on silk from Serindia see A. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, Pl. VI. The Chinese steps being double, the Chinese representations show fourteen lotus-flowers. On the Tibetan versions published by J. Hackin *Les scènes figurées de la vie du Buddha d'après des peintures tibétaines*, the seven lotuses are spread in each of the four directions of the compass.



## III.—THE FIRST RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION.

In short we shall henceforth be able to follow, step by step, the evolution of the motif of the Buddhist Nativity from its origin until modern times. To obtain this result we have simply classified the documents already in our possession. Still, we ought not to leave the reader under any illusion as to the precise nature of our classification which we cannot guarantee to be absolutely chronological. To reduce the complexity of the facts to a single linear series cannot be attempted without stretching them. Therefore we do not claim that the development of the motif has actually followed a perfectly systematic and regular course. We all know that logic does not control artistic creation, and in the present case the monuments themselves are a warning to us. Thus, for example, on the oldest carved railing at Sāñchī, that of *Stūpa* II, we find the most developed forms side by side with the most primitive ones (see Pl. III, 1 and 9), although in theory a very long interval should have elapsed between their respective appearances. On the other hand, the intermediate link of the woman seated on the lotus is entirely missing there, and is supplied only at a much later date by the gateways of *Stūpa* I (Pl. III, 11). Once this is admitted, we can hardly deviate either from the normal workings of the human mind or from historical probability if, whenever precise dates are lacking, we reconstruct the series of successive changes according to Nature's principles, that is, by gradually proceeding from the simple to the complex.

On no other occasion, perhaps, than in the case of the Nativity motif, is it more clearly noticeable how numerous and gradual these transformations were, at least within the pale of the Indian School; for the Gandhāra School, as usual, is signalized by a clean break with the past. No doubt the old artists did not work with a view to simplifying the task of future archaeologists; still we must be grateful to them for having followed a system so methodical even in its uncouthness. To sum up, the first makers of Buddhist images solved the problem of the figuration of the Nativity by suppressing it and, as in the case of the three other Great Miracles, simply substituted the symbol for the scene. Their direct heirs in Central India, the sculptors of the II and I centuries B. C., while religiously preserving the old symbolic motif, gradually developed it until, for the sake of greater clearness, they introduced into it the image of the mother; but they continued to struggle against the difficulty of representing the birth without ever depicting the child. The appearance in Gandhāra of the little Bodhisattva issuing from his mother's hip ushers in, at last, the complete solution and one which has ever since been the rule. At the same time the old allegorical stock, lotus included, is thrown overboard as useless, and the figure of Māyā alone affords a connection between the compositions of the two schools. It is only in the later versions of the Peninsula or their replicas in the Far-East that the symbol of the *padma* gradually reappears and reasserts itself, once more proving how true it is of Buddhist Iconography that its decline is linked on to its very beginning.



Such is, at all events, the schematic curve of the evolution which so clearly reveals itself on our Plates. Once the latter are arranged and annotated, we would willingly consider our task as completed and leave the reader to form his own judgment from the documents themselves. But some points are so closely related to our subject that we could not help alluding to them in the preceding pages and may well anticipate further questions about them. Why, it will be asked, has the identifications now proposed stepped in so late in the day, if it be so obvious? And, if correct, how shall we explain the total transfer of the motif from Māyā to Lakshmi? And, finally, how does our theory tally with the constant use of the lotus in the modern Iconography of Buddhism? Such are the three principal difficulties which might be raised and about which, in order to avoid all misunderstanding, we feel it necessary to offer some explanations.

*Criticism of the Identification.*—If our argument be sound, it will not escape the critical observer that, on the one hand, a considerable number of the figured monuments become at once intelligible and, on the other, that most of these monuments have been public property for at least thirty years. How, then, did it happen that the archaeologists, including the author of the present Memoir, have for so long failed to see their true significance? To this we would reply in all humility that, once a tradition has been lost (as is the case in India with Buddhist art) it cannot be recovered in a day. It is only step by step that we shall succeed in reviving the forgotten meaning of those venerable reliefs, and it is by no means certain that we shall ever succeed for all of them. Moreover, as we have seen, the interpretation of the Nativity motif met with special obstacles. In the first place research was, from the very beginning, led astray in a very plausible manner by the indisputable fact that the most elaborate composition of the Old School had been monopolized by a Brahmanical goddess ever since the Middle Ages. In the second place the old image-carvers themselves, when representing the Great Miracle of Kapilavastu, hesitated between the elephant of the Conception, the lotus of the Nativity and the horse of the Great Renunciation, so that the meaning of the *padma* was not immediately presented to us with the same clear emphasis as that of the tree, the wheel or the *stūpa*. For our part we must own that it was the statistics of the subject most frequently represented on the Sāñchī gateways which first aroused our attention and directed it into a new channel. Then only, a number of reliefs upon which we had, like everyone else, cast a heedless eye, suddenly acquired an unsuspected value and began to arrange themselves into a persuasive series. In archaeological matters it is a truism that man finds only what he seeks, nay (to quote Pascal) that he seeks only what he has already found!

There is finally one more obstacle, less evident at first, but much more insidious and which has not failed to hinder the progress of our demonstration. We refer to the half-historical, half-legendary character of the traditions relating to the coming of Śākya-muni into this world. To whatever sects the texts belong, they never manage to make a clear choice between a purely miraculous birth and



a purely human one. Even the *Mahāvastu*, the manual of discipline of the Lokottara-vādin, that is to say of those "who professed belief in the supernatural character" of their Master, docilely repeats the hallowed version and wavers exactly, as the others do, between fiction and reality<sup>1</sup>. The school of Gandhāra does exactly the same in its semi-realistic, semi-fictitious representation of the Nativity, whilst the Old School deviates from the start into a purely allegorical figuration of the miracle. From this, as we already noted, not only arises the most disconcerting contrast between their respective productions, but it also follows that the Indo-Greek model is the only one which openly complies with the Buddhist scriptures. What explicit quotation can we actually bring forward to support our interpretation of the essential element in the ancient Indian versions, viz., the lotus?—Nothing but a sentence borrowed from the *Sukhāvatī-vyūha*, a late text, and which does not relate to Śākya-muni... True, but, shall we ask in our turn, is the testimony of the monuments of no account? They, themselves, without any solution of continuity, from the most modern pictures of Amitābha's paradise to the most primitive medallions of the *stūpa* railings, have persistently shown us in the lotus the symbol, nay the *matrix* of every supernatural and immaculate birth. They, themselves, drawn up in close formation, force upon our minds through our own eyes, the fact that the popular belief, regardless of the scruples of the doctors, has from a very early date applied that emblem to the miraculous Nativity of the Bhagavat. In short, they themselves, in the present case have provided their own commentary; and it is certainly interesting to verify once more that they often enable us to obtain a deeper insight into the minds of their creators and donors than the actual texts.

It will be perceived, and we make no effort to disguise the fact, that the soundness of our theory rests above all on the spontaneity with which the existing monuments have proceeded to arrange themselves on our Plates in an order at once logical and historical. To this first argument we can immediately add another; the new advance we flatter ourselves upon having made in the interpretation of the most ancient remains of Buddhist art leads us in a direction the safeness and utility of which have already been proved. Remember how the progress of this branch of archæology has always consisted in discovering the hidden Buddhist meaning in reliefs which had at first been believed to be purely ornamental or whose special significance had escaped the early pioneers. For instance, it was only when the representation of the Second Great Miracle had been recognized in the "tree-worship" of J. Fergusson that we found ourselves on the right track—the same one which led us to the recognition of the Third Great Miracle in the worship of the wheel and of the fourth in that of the *stūpa*, etc. Thus the number of the so-called "decorative motifs" keeps diminishing

<sup>1</sup> If (as already noted above, p. 6) even in the case of the fabulous Dīpaṅkara the *Mahāvastu* has ventured to resort to the magical process of the *padma* only on the occasion of the Second Great Miracle and not, as might have been expected, of the first, it is because the story of the birth of every Buddha from the right side of his mother had already become stereotyped once for all.



to the increase of the list of episodes drawn from the Buddha's life. It is only a question of deciphering the word for which the symbol stands. We already knew that in the ancient Buddhist repertory the *aśvattha* tree meant "Enlightenment", the wheel, "Preaching", the tumulus, "Decease"; we believe we can now add that the lotus should be read "Birth"

*The Transference of the Motif.*—If this conclusion be true, it now devolves upon us to explain, at least briefly, when and how Śrī-Lakṣmī came to take the place of Māyā on the lotus and beneath the two elephants. That this substitution of persons must be ancient enough is intimated by the fact that no recollection of it seems to have been preserved in India. The curious seals discovered by Dr. Th. Bloch and Dr. D. B. Spooner at Basārḥ (Vaiśālī) and by Sir John Marshall at Bhīṭā lead us to believe that, in all probability, it was an accomplished fact by the time of the Guptas<sup>1</sup>. Nor is there anything surprising in this. Three or four centuries had elapsed since the School of Gandhāra had created its new types and so completely re-fashioned the Nativity that the older model was felt to be no longer serviceable. Does this imply that the Buddhist sculptors immediately threw it on the rubbish heap where their Brahmanic confrères picked it up? No such childish idea need be attributed to us. To begin with—we do not hesitate to repeat it once more—we have never found in ancient or mediæval India any trace of guilds of sculptors entirely composed of Buddhists or Brahmanists or Jainists; nor have we perceived any real difference of style between contemporary images of Buddhas or Jinas, of Bodhisattvas or Devas when they originated from the ruins of the same city or adorned the same group of temple-caves. At the most we should be inclined to suppose, until the production of some proof to the contrary, that the Buddhist donors had a less conservative turn of mind and were in their orders somewhat ahead of their compatriots belonging to other Indian religions. In this particular instance they probably took the initiative in assigning to the first feminine deity who played a great part in their worship the accessories left vacant by the removal of Māyā to another setting. At least this is what a Hārītī image, found in Kashmir and now in the Indian Museum of London, would lead us to believe; for, by her side, the two sprinkling elephants rise unexpectedly from the oblivion into which they had fallen<sup>2</sup>. Apparently the exact meaning of the ancient motif thus brought back into use after two or three centuries of neglect was no longer understood and, in this lustral shower bath was then seen only what is seen to-day, an omen of good fortune and a symbol of abundance. As, on the other hand, the former ogress Hārītī had become the goddess of fecundity and the wife of the genius presiding over wealth,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *A. S. I.*, 1903-4, Pl. XL, 1911-12, Pl. XIX; 1913-14, Pl. XLVII, No. 200. Note on these seals (*A. S. I.* 1903-4, Pl. XL) and on the medallions from Śrāvastī (*A. S. I.*, 1910-11, Pl. III) the survival of the "lotus and vase" type.

<sup>2</sup> For the details relating to this sculpture—the only link at present known to us of the aforesaid transmission—see our essay on *Les images indiennes de la Fortune* in the *Mémoires concernant l'Asie Orientale*, t. I. As to the important part played by Hārītī in the popular religion, see *Art. g. b. Gandh.*, t. II, pp. 130 and 139.



one realizes how easily this detail of her images passed on to her Hindu counterpart, Śrī-Lakṣmī. As to the lotus on which the latter is invariably seated, nowhere, perhaps (save in the case of Brahmā Svayambhū, "he whose birth is spontaneous")<sup>1</sup> does this symbol appear more appositely beneath a Brahmanical deity; for we must not forget that the lovely Indian Goddess of Fortune is supposed to have sprang miraculously from the depths of the Sea of Milk. In these obscure questions where we are still groping, such are the first outlines we can dimly perceive of a plausible explanation of the devolution of the motif. But while awaiting what further discoveries may have to teach us regarding the period of transition, we ought to grasp all the more firmly both ends of the series, *viz.*, the two certain identifications of this image, at first with Māyā for the whole period anterior to our era, and afterwards, with Śrī-Lakṣmī since the III or IV century A.D.

*The Lotus in Later Iconography.*—We will also confine ourselves to a brief sketch of the special study which the constant use of the *padma* in modern and even contemporary Buddhist image-making would deserve. There is, for instance, scarcely a Tibetan idol, either standing or seated, which is not placed on a full-blown lotus. If the lamas were asked the reason for this practice, they would probably reply that they do it in conformity with the traditional usage, but how this custom spread and on what belief it is founded, no one cares to know. A rapid review of the monuments and texts will allow us to connect more or less loosely a certain number of facts. It is evident that at first the lotus was not lavished on all comers. The Old School never used it save for the miracle of the Nativity. Later on, when the artists of Gandhāra began to figure the personages of the Buddhist mythology, they quite properly restricted it to the reliefs which depict Bodhisattvas sitting in the heaven of their birth<sup>2</sup>. In all probability it is their later compositions of the "Great Miracle at Śrāvastī" which, from the II century A.D. made the breach through which the rest of the pantheon finally broke in. There, not content with seating the Buddha on the "thousand-petalled" lotus specified in the texts, they place a lotus footstool under the feet of each of the numerous celestial beings who, poised in the air, witness the Master's victory over the heads of the rival sects<sup>3</sup>. These extravagant pictures supplied, on the one hand, the prototype of the Serindian and Sino-Japanese images of Amitābha, surrounded by his assistants and seated in his paradise among soul-growing lotus-blossoms. On the other hand, in India proper, they were the origin of those endless rows of stereotyped Buddhas which adorn many of the carved and painted panels at Ajantā, and in which the *padma* already forms, as it were, an integral part of the Bhagavat<sup>4</sup>. We shall not be surprised

<sup>1</sup> That is the very reason why Brahmā is always represented seated on a lotus—so that Varāha-Mihira in the *Bṛhat-Saṃhitā* (LVIII, 44) compares his images with those of the Buddha.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Art g.-b. Gandh.*, figs. 145, 349.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, figs. 79 and 566; and *J. A.*, Janv.-Fév. 1909, or *Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, Pls. XXVII, XXVIII.

<sup>4</sup> Griffiths, *Paintings*, Pls. 15 and 21, 1; *Cave-temples*, Pls. XXXI; *A. S. W. I.*, IV, Pl. XXXVII, 2, etc.



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when we find that the sculptors of Ellora soon extended the same privilege to their Bodhisattvas, both masculine and feminine<sup>1</sup>. Later on, in Magadha and Bengal, even the Tāntric images usurp it in their turn, as may be seen on the steles as well as on the miniatures, while the *sādhana* magic texts have no other way of evoking them save on this hallowed support. But in this increasing diffusion of the use of the *padma*, we continue to follow as a leading thread—and it is that which here concerns us—the persistence of its symbolic significance. Just as it had been formerly used as an emblem for the miraculous Birth of the Buddha at Kapilavastu, and then for his “transfiguration” at Śrāvastī, so it is finally granted to the other members of the Buddhist pantheon as a mark of their supernatural origin and, consequently, of their truly divine nature.

Such is the conclusion actually reached by our researches, and here we shall stop for the present. We only ask permission to remark in closing that this result which we believe valid for all Indian mythology, has been obtained by the help of purely Indian documents. It would have been easy, though not so safe, to support our thesis by some analogies, very striking indeed, but alien to the land of the Buddha's birth. It is a well-known fact that in Egyptian mythology Horus, too, was miraculously born from a lotus and that this flower had, in the Nile Valley, from the remotest ages of which we possess any knowledge, the same symbolic significance which we have just ascribed to it in India<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the tradition has never been entirely lost, even in Europe; we must not seek elsewhere, for thus do myths end, the source of the nursery tales which are solemnly repeated to successive generations and which would have us believe that children grow spontaneously in cabbages.

*Postscript.*—The foregoing Memoir, after a long gestation, was written down in Simla during the summer of 1919 and kindly translated into English by Mr. H. Hargreaves in the following year; but, since then, our extensive journeys through India, Persia, Afghanistan and Japan have delayed its publication. Meanwhile, Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has published in *Eastern Art*, Vol. I, No. 3, (Philadelphia, January 1929), a paper on “Śrī-Lakshmi”, at the end of which—nipping in the bud, as it were, a suggestion which we happened to make as far back as 1915 in the *Images indiennes de la Fortune*—he concludes (p. 187) that “the interpretation of the *abhisheka* composition as a representation of Māyā Devī may confidently be dismissed.” So the above theory finds itself in the curious predicament of having been refuted, if not prior to its birth, at least before the appearance of any detailed justification of itself. We still hope that the distinguished archæologist of the Boston Museum and our other Indianist confrères will kindly reconsider this verdict in the light of the arguments for the

<sup>1</sup> Burgess, *A. S. W. I.*, V, Pl. XIII and XVI-XX.

<sup>2</sup> Clermont-Ganneau, *Études d'Archéologie orientale*, I, p. 123 (*La naissance d'Horus*); *Rev. de l'Hist. des Religions* 1913, LIX, p. 151; 1914, LXX, p. 51; *J. A.* 1883, I, p. 127, n. 1; and 1917, I, p. 499 (A. Moret, *Le lotus et la naissance des Dieux en Égypte*), etc.



first time adduced above. Personally, we have no taste for polemics, but we feel compelled, on our side, to point out that:—

1. As for the two bathing *nāga*, the Buddhist texts afford an explanation of their presence and rôle infinitely more topical and convincing than any number of Vedic allusions to showering clouds;

2. As for the lotus-flowers, the old Lakshmi theory which Dr. Coomaraswamy undertakes to vindicate entirely omits to account for the all-important use of this symbol in ancient and modern Buddhist Art;

3. As for the whole composition, the progress recently made in the general interpretation of the Sāñchi sculptures utterly precludes the Śrī-Lakshmi identification. We know now for certain that on those Buddhists monuments, among exclusively Buddhist scenes, there is no room for a relatively considerable number of representations of a Brahmanical goddess who (as Dr. Coomaraswamy readily admits, p. 177) “in Buddhist literature is naturally treated with scant respect”







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## PLATE I.

A collection of more or less stylized lotuses from the Barhut railing in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. They all measure from Om. 47 to Om. 49 in diameter.

1. This though highly developed is one of the simplest forms; it decorates the *sūchi* or cross-bar 42.

2. The pattern is nearly the same but for the outer row of petals all curved at the top (cross-bar 43): sometimes this kind of curl even takes the form of a *nāga's* head, as on the cross-bar 22.

3. The outer row of petals has given place to a kind of feathery wreath of leaves, and some of the inner petals are closed over the seed-vessel of the flower (cross-bar 40).

4. The inner lotus is encompassed by a ring of eight winged lions (cross-bar 39). Such lions, both with or without wings and generally combined with lotuses, recur very often on the railings of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī and of Amarāvati (cf. Pl. III, 3-4 and IV, 11). I do not think it is overstraining their symbolism to see in them at least an allusion to *Śākya-simha*, "the lion among the Śākyas", i.e., the Buddha.

5. In any case the symbol implied by the following lotus (cross-bar 20) is unmistakable: each of the four elephants is shown exactly in the posture of that of the Conception at Barhut (see Gunningham, *Stūpa of Barhut*, Pl. XXVIII, 2) or at Sāñchī (*Stūpa* II, pillars 6a and 85b) and, as on the last-named sculpture, carries a lotus in its trunk.

6. This would suggest to us that the bust of the lady holding a lotus in her right hand in the centre of the lotus (cross-bar 33) might be Māyā, the mother of the Buddha. This hypothesis is strengthened by a comparison with the representations of Māyā on the next three plates.





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ILLUSTRATIONS FROM BARHUT.











## PLATE II.

Plate II, as a sequel to the preceding one, brings together six more medallions borrowed from the Barhut railing.

1. On pillar 19, this stylized lotus, made of four *nandi-pada*, lends itself to an interesting comparison with similar ones at Sāñchī (cf. Pl. III, 1) as well as on coins (cf. Pl. IV, 2-4). We long ago surmised that in the minds of the Buddhists the *nandi-pada* or the bull itself referred to the constellation which presided over Buddha's Nativity (See *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art*, commentary to Pl. I).

2. No. 2 (cross-bar 21) with its garland of lotuses surrounding a central lotus is here given as a connecting link between the flowers shown on Pl. I, 1-3, and the following ones on this plate.

3. No. 3 (cross-bar 15) in which the outer garland of lotuses is shown issuing from a water-jar, supplies the transition from No. 2 to No. 4.

4. This is a good specimen of a symbol which will recur several times on the following plates, since it appears so often on the old Buddhist monuments. A bunch of lotuses spreads out from one of those *ghaṭa* filled with water which, to the eye of every Hindu is even nowadays an auspicious sight (cross-bar 8). Shall we look for a meaning in the two pairs of *haṃsa* which here, as often elsewhere (see, for instance, Cunningham, *Stūpa of Barhut*, Pl. XXXVIII, 1 and Sāñchī, Stūpa II, pillars 37b, 43b, [Pl. III, 6], 52a, etc.) are poised on the flowers?

5. The next medallion (cross-bar 23) goes one or rather two steps further: not only is Māyā herself seated on the pericarp of the central lotus as on Plate III, 11; but (as on Pl. III, 12) the two *nāga* have already taken their stand on either side of her, each on a flower.

6. The last medallion, borrowed from pillar 4, mainly differs from the preceding one by showing Māyā standing, as on Plates III, 9, 13 and IV, 8, 13-15.





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ILLUSTRATIONS FROM BARHUT.







### PLATE III.

Nos. 1-9 are all borrowed from the old railing of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī, in order to exemplify both the striking analogy with the Barhut medallions and the parallel development of the Nativity scene. It must be understood that the specimens given here are selected from a large number of similar motives, as will be seen when this interesting old railing is published in its entirety by Sir John Marshall.

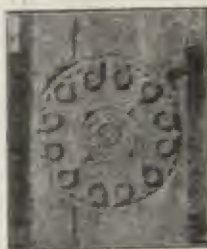
1-3. (Pillars 35a, 16b and 61b): here we leave out the different variations on the theme of the lotus flower and start with the introduction into the motif of the *nandi-pada* symbol (cf. Pl. II, 1 and IV, 2-4), of the elephant (cf. Pl. I, 5), and of the lion. In this particular instance the lion is wingless, but in several others, as on No. 4 (cf. Pl. I, 4) he is endowed with a pair of wings.

4-6. (Pillars 79b, 23a and 43b): the next three medallions illustrate the probable development of the bunch of lotuses. On No. 4 the stems simply spread out from behind a pleated leaf. On No. 5 they spring from the mouth of a tortoise; and this curious feature—the meaning of which, if it has any, escapes us—is repeated several times. In No. 6 we find the standardized representation which we have already seen at Barhut (Pl. II, 4) and which we shall soon meet again on the gateways of *Stūpa* II at Sāñchī (Pl. III, 10) as everywhere else in India (see Plates IV-V).

7-9. (Pillars 21b, 26b, 85b): However, before we again proceed in that direction, we should first pause to notice on the old railing of *Stūpa* II some curious representations of the female figure in which we recognise Māyā. Now, she is alone, as on No. 7, holding a lotus in her right hand; now, as on No. 8, she stands out on the background of a lotus in the company of two maid-servants, one of whom holds an umbrella and a pitcher and the other a fly-flap—attributes befitting a queen but also, as we know, (see above, p. 14, note 1) alluding to the invisible presence of the Bodhisattva; now, as on No. 9 she is already attended by the two bathing *nāga*. In each case she is shown standing somewhat clumsily, facing the spectator.

10-13. The last four specimens are taken from the famous gateways of *Stūpa* I at Sāñchī. No. 10 is here given as a connecting link between Nos. 6 and 11. This old form of the motif occurs on the Southern, Northern, and Eastern gates. On the Southern gate we see Māyā seated on the main lotus but without the two assistant elephants. (No. 11). The latter make their appearance on the Northern and Eastern gates (No. 12), as well as on the small gateway of *Stūpa* III. On No. 13, borrowed from the Western and latest gate, and also on a panel of the Northern gate, Māyā is at last shown standing on a lotus and under an umbrella between the two *nāga*: this composition may be taken as the ultimate achievement of the old Buddhist school when struggling with the representation of the Buddha's Nativity.





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## PLATE IV.

On Plate IV are collected replicas of the old Nativity motif procured from different places in India, it being necessary for our thesis to prove both its frequency and its ubiquity. Amarāvati, Mathurā, Bodh-Gayā and the caves of Orissa on the one hand, Indian, Indo-Greek, and Indo-Scythian coins on the other, have all contributed their share to this visual demonstration.

1-4. The first figures show more stylized forms of the lotus on the old punched or cast coins. The designs of Nos. 1 and 2 are borrowed from Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*, Pl. XI, 2, 4 and Pl. I, 5, 6. That of No. 3 is taken from Dr. D. B. Spooner, *A New Find of Punch-marked Coins*, in *A. S. I.*, 1905-06, Pl. LIVa, 3, 14. The first is of fairly simple form, still adhering to the sacred number of eight petals; the two following show three umbrellas combined in a fanciful manner with as many *nandī-pada*, the latter being in many instances framed by petals. In No. 4, a cast coin (see V. Smith, *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, Pl. XIX, 13), a very stereotyped flower-centre between two Bodhi-trees is surmounted by a *nandī-pada*.

5-8. Nos. 5-7 are borrowed from the *Coins of Greek and Scythian Kings of Bactria and India in the British Museum* by Percy Gardner (Pl. III, 9; IV, 9; XIX, 5), and No. 8 from the *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum*, by R. B. Whitehead (Pl. XIII, No. 332). They are intended to illustrate the metamorphosis of the so-called "dancing-girl" of Pantaleon and Agathocles into the full-blown Māyā of Azes (cf. Pl. III, 7) and Azilises (cf. Pl. III, 9, 13; IV, 13-15).

9. No. 9 gives a specimen of a *bhadra-ghaṭa* filled with lotuses as found on a cast coin of uncertain origin in the Indian Museum, Calcutta (see V. Smith's *Catalogue*, Pl. XXII, 19 and p. 200). It may be mentioned that the same symbol as well as the Lakṣmī type, occurs later, on coins of Chandragupta (cf. *ibid.*, Pl. XVII, 4 and p. 110).

10-11. The two following specimens have been selected from among the famous Amarāvati sculptures in South Eastern India. They prove that the artists of the Andhras had inherited from those of the Śunga dynasty not only the motif of the lotus, but that of the lotus-pot as well; only both are, as is usual with them, treated in a much more decorative and lavish style. (We noted above, p. 11, note 2, that the Andhra school went no further in that direction). No. 10, an almost complete specimen, is now in the British Museum (cf. J. Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, Pl. XCVI, 4). No. 11, in the Madras Museum, besides combining two lions or rather two wingless leogryphs with the lotus flowers (cf. J. Burgess, *Stūpas of Amarāvati and Jagayyapeṭa*, Pl. LIV, 1), is of especial interest in that it clearly presents the symbol at the bottom row of the numerous steles which superpose the four great events of the Buddha's life. In this particular instance, raised on the head and hands of an Atlas and just beneath a broken image of the *Sambodhi*, the lotus-pot can only correspond to the *Jāti* or Nativity.

12. Let us now proceed to the North-West of India. In the old Mathurā school—besides the lotus, which goes without saying—we find again the same lotus-pot with the same evident meaning. It appears twice, for instance, on a lintel published by Prof. J. Ph. Vogel (*A. S. I.*, 1909-10, Pl. XXVII; cf. his *Catalogue of the Archaeological Museum at Mathurā*, No. M. 3, pp. 163-64). The two vases are contained in square panels topping the gate-pillars and back to back with representations of the First Sermon and of the *Parinirvāṇa* respectively. The left hand one is here reproduced, (ht. Om. 19).

13. We must moreover call the reader's attention to numerous images of a female deity now lying in the Museum at Mathurā (Muttra). She always stands between two lotuses, the stems of which she sometimes holds in her hands, while from the top of the flowers two elephants pour water over her head. We select for publication a specimen (ht. Om. 21) which, though much worn, possesses the advantage of having been entered in Prof. Vogel's *Catalogue* under No. D. 17 (cf. D. 9). The style and dress of these small images point to a date previous to the transfer of their attribution from Māyā to Lakṣmī.

14-15. With the two following bas-reliefs we return to Eastern India. No. 14 is one of the two Nativity scenes still extant on the remains of the old Bodh-Gayā railing (pillar No. 8; cf. Cunningham, *Mahabodhi*. Pl. VIII, 7).

No. 15 decorates one of the curved pediments of the Ananta Cave on Khandagiri Hill in Orissa and is here reproduced from a cast in the Indian Museum, Calcutta (cf. J. Fergusson and J. Burgess, *Cave-Temples*, Pl. I, 1 and see J. Anderson's *Catalogue and Handbook of the Archaeological Collections in the Indian Museum*, I, pp. 146-7). The particular shape of the frame has thrown the two *nāga* too far back and too low down to allow them to accomplish their customary task properly; but they still make their usual gesture of uplifting a water-jar by the ends of their trunks. Another feature worth mentioning is the presence, behind the two elephants, of two birds, probably *hamsas*, pecking at the seeds of the lotus-flowers on which they sit (cf. Pl. II, 4 and III, 6).





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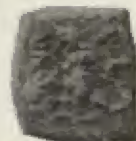
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## PLATE V.

Some of the old Buddhist symbols, viz., the tree of the Illumination and the wheel of the First Sermon, have already been pointed out as occasionally found amongst the productions of the school of Gandhāra: we shall have no difficulty in detecting in the same way sporadic appearances of the lotus of the Nativity.

1-2. Nos. 1-2 show it endlessly repeated on friezes, much as it used to be on railings in the old Indian school. The first fragment (No. 2145 in the Indian Museum at Calcutta, measuring Om. 15 in height) still keeps to the old number of eight petals multiplied by two. The second one (No. 980, Lahore) twists the stamens and brings the number of petals up to twenty-four. Both are far simpler than the highly elaborated rosettes of Barhut and Amarāvati.

3-7. In Nos. 3-7, we meet again our old acquaintance, the vase filled with lotus flowers. No. 3 (a fragment of a bas-relief No. 1327), No. 4 (a gem No. 93), and No. 6 (a cast of a *stūpa*-frieze fortunately made before the original was destroyed by the villagers of Sahri-Bahlol) have already been published or commented upon by Dr. D. B. Spooner (*A. S. I.*, 1909-10, Pl. XVI, 1 and pp. 51-52), and are now in the Peshawar Museum. Nos. 5 and 7 belong to the Lahore Museum, (Nos. 1081 and 1850); we owe the photographs of these, as well as those of Nos. 2 and 8, to the kindness of Rai Daya Ram Sahni Bahadur. The reason for the order of these various replicas on the plate is obvious. On Nos. 3-5, we see the lotus-pot alone; note how its flowers become more and more stylized until they finally assume on No. 5, as on several medallions of the railing of *Stūpa II* at Sāñchi, the appearance of the honeysuckle ornament. Nos. 6-7, on the other hand, show us the actual worship of this symbol. In fact on No. 3, as pointed out by Dr. Spooner, it is already "flanked on either side by banners of streamers dependent from a triangular frame" on No. 5 it is attended by two rows of worshippers holding flowers and garlands in their hands, while in one of the compartments of No. 7 it actually takes the place of the Buddha's image between the two traditional assistants.

8-9. But the most convincing proof that, even in the minds of the Gandhāra artists, this symbol was connected with the Buddha's Nativity, is brought out by the two following bas-reliefs. No. 8 reproduces No. 201 in the Lahore Museum and shows on its left margin a part of "Asita's Horoscope" No. 9 was discovered in Jamāl-garhi and kindly sent to me by Mr. H. Hargreaves; it seems to preserve on its right a trace of the "Bath of the Infant Buddha" To our eyes, there is no doubt that in both cases, although the fancy of the artists has made the personages move in opposite directions, the main bas-relief represents the intermediate scene between the Bath and the Horoscope, i.e., the "Coming back from the Lumbinī Garden" Māyā is seated alone in a kind of *howdah* on an elephant while Śuddhodaṇa escorts her on horse-back, and coming to meet them, a personage of distinction holds in both hands a lotus-pot. As the child is not shown here in the arms of his mother (as is usually the case) this symbol practically gives us the only clue that the scene belongs to the Nativity cycle.





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## PLATE VI.

1-3. Nos. 1-3 are here reproduced to show the general trend of the Nativity scene (new style) in its migration from Gandhāra to Bengal, and its partial regression towards its origins. No. 1 already presents a peculiarity, rare in Gandhāra: the infant Buddha is seen twice, first springing into life and then taking the "Seven Steps". Of course, in either circumstance, no lotus is shown here. When, with No. 2, we come to Benares and the Gupta period, we notice that the second infant Buddha is standing on a high-stemmed lotus, while two *nāga*-serpents give him his first bath from the same pitchers which, in the old school, were upheld by the two *nāga*-elephants. One step further, and on No. 3, a fragment of a mediæval stele from Bengal, mother and child are each standing on a lotus, nay, the infant Buddha is even depicted on a heap of seven of these flowers, in order to remind us of the fact that a lotus sprang up under each of his seven steps.

These three sculptures are in the Museum at Calcutta. The first one bears the number 5034 and comes from the Swāt Valley (ht. Om. 45). The second is the lowest compartment of the four-storied stele catalogued under No. S(ārnāth) 2 (see Anderson's *Handbook*, etc., II, p. 6) and measures Om. 34 in height. The third (No. 4576) is the lower right-hand part of a large stele, found at Ghosikundi, which represents, as usual, the Buddha seated in the attitude of the Illumination and surrounded by the other great events of his life. The three teaching Buddhas at the foot, looking in opposite directions, commemorate the "Great Miracle at Śrāvastī". The height of the part here represented is Om. 70.

4. No. 4 is the only fragment of painting reproduced on our plates. It is borrowed through the kindness of Sir Aurel Stein from one of the magnificent silk banners now in the British Museum, which he brought back from Tun-Huang on his second journey to Central Asia. Many of these large compositions were studied by the late, lamented R. Petrucci and were found to represent "paradises" of different Buddhas. In every one of them, the new inhabitants of that particular heaven are born into it seated on the cup of a lotus growing out of a celestial tank, in the manner shown on the plate. This detail has been taken from No. Ch. LIV. 004 and is given here to serve as an illustration to the quotation from the *Sukhāvatī-vyūha*, given above, p. 6.



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ILLUSTRATIONS OF GANDHARA, GUPTA, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN REPRESENTATIONS.



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